

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1261

INFO AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO

AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL

C O N F I D E N T I A L QUITO 5974

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: CASC PINT PFOR EC

SUBJECT: DETENTION OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS: UNDERSECRETARY JUSTIFIES
GOE ACTION TO DIPLOMATS

1. SUMMARY: ON AUGUST 19 THE UNDERSECRETARY OF GOVT CALLED IN THE CHIEFS OF MISSION OF THOSE COUNTRIES WHOSE CITIZENS HAD BEEN DETAINED IN CONNECTION WITH THE GOE POLICE ACTION AGAINST THE RIOBAMBA BISHOPS' MEETING. THE UNDERSECRETARY PASSED AROUND SOME OF THE DOCUMENTS THAT HAD BEEN SEIZED AT THE MEETING AND WHICH HE ARGUED DEMONSTRATED ITS SUBVERSIVE CHARACTER. HE ALSO JUSTIFIED THE MANNER IN WHICH THE BISHOPS WERE DETAINED ON THE GROUNDS THAT A SHOW OF FORCE WAS NECESSARY TO DETER BISHOP PROANO FROM MOBILIZING HIS INDIANS. LATER, ONE OF GENERAL DURAN'S CONFIDANTS SPOKE TO THE AMBASSADOR ALONG THE SAME LINES AS THE UNDERSECRETARY. END SUMMARY.

2. THE UNDERSECRETARY OF GOVT, DR. XAVIER MANRIQUE INVITED THOSE CHIEFS OF MISSION WHOSE CITIZENS HAD BEEN SEIZED IN LAST WEEK'S RAID ON RIOBAMBA BISHOPS' MEETING TO A SERIES OF INFORMAL DISCUSSIONS IN HIS OFFICE ON AUGUST 19. MANRIQUE, WHO HAD BEEN ACTING MINISTER OF GOVT WHEN THE RAID TOOK PLACE, CALLED IN THE DIPLOMATS IN SMALL GROUPS DURING THE COURSE OF THE DAY. THE AMBASSADOR WAS AMONG THE FIRST
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GROUP TO MEET WITH THE UNDERSECRETARY, ALONG WITH THE

AMBASSADORS OF PERU AND MEXICO AND THE COLOMBIAN CHARGE.

3. MANRIQUE EMPHASIZED THE INFORMAL NATURE OF THE MEETING AND THE FACT THAT THE GOE WAS TAKING THIS STEP OUT OF CONSIDERATION FOR THE FRIENDLY GOVTS WHOSE CITIZENS HAD BEEN DETAINED. HE THEN CIRCULATED SOME OF THE DOCUMENTS THAT HAD BEEN SEIZED AT THE MEETING. NONE OF THE DIPLOMATS HAD TIME TO READ THE DOCUMENTS IN ANY DETAIL. ONE OF THE DOCUMENTS APPEARED TO BE AN HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY ANALYSIS OF THE ECUADOREAN POLITICAL/SOCIAL SYSTEM. IT USED A NUMBER OF THE FAVORITE CLICHES AND CHARGES OF THE EXTREME LEFT, INCLUDING THE ACCUSATION THAT THE ECUADOREAN OLIGARCHY AND THE U.S. WERE CONSPIRING TO STERILIZE ECUADOREAN INDIAN WOMEN.

4. THE UNDERSECRETARY NOTED THAT IT WAS THE VIEW OF THE GOVT THAT MOST OF THE PARTICIPANTS WERE NOT EXTREMISTS AND HAD COME TO THE MEETING INNOCENTLY. HOWEVER, THE GOE BELIEVED ON THE BASIS OF THE EVIDENCE THAT A SMALL GROUP OF PARTICIPANTS, LED BY BISHOP PROANO, WERE HOLDING A "MEETING WITHIN THE MEETING". THE PURPOSE OF THIS CONSPIRACY WAS TO ORGANIZE REVOLUTIONARY CELLS IN SEVERAL SOUTH AMERICAN COUNTRIES. IN ANY EVENT THE UNDERSECRETARY STATED IT WAS INADMISSABLE FOR FOREIGNERS TO BE DISCUSSING INTERNAL ECUADOREAN POLITICAL AFFAIRS.

5. THE AMBASSADOR AND HIS THREE COLLEAGUES BRIEFLY DISCUSSED WITH THE UNDERSECRETARY THE CONTENTS OF THE DOCUMENTS THAT HE HAD SHOWN THEM. IN ONE FASHION OR ANOTHER EACH MADE THE SAME POINT: THAT THE CONTENTS OF THE DOCUMENTS WERE SUBJECT TO VARYING INTERPRETATIONS BUT THAT AS THE DIPLOMATIC REPRESENTATIVE OF A FOREIGN COUNTRY IT WOULD NOT BE APPROPRIATE FOR HIM TO GIVE AN OPINION AS TO WHETHER THE DOCUMENTS CONSTITUTED EVIDENCE OF ANY SUBVERSIVE INTENT; THAT WAS UP TO THE GOVT OF ECUADOR TO DECIDE.

6. THE AMBASSADOR DID, HOWEVER, RAISE WITH THE UNDERSECRETARY THE MANNER IN WHICH THE PARTICIPANTS HAD BEEN ROUNDED UP AND DEPRIVED OF THEIR LIBERTY FOR OVER 24 HOURS. HE RECOUNTED TO THE UNDERSECRETARY THE DESCRIPTION THAT THE AMERICAN BISHOPS HAD GIVEN HIM OF THE WAY IN WHICH THE POLICE HAD BURST INTO CONFIDENTIAL

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THE MEETING ARMED WITH SUBMACHINE GUNS AND TEAR GAS GRENADES AND HOW THEY HAD BRUSQUELY FORCED EVERYONE INTO THE BUS FOR THE RIDE TO QUITO. HE POINTED OUT THAT THE POLICE HAD FAILED TO IDENTIFY THEMSELVES AND THAT THE PRIESTS WERE IN MORTAL FEAR OF THEIR LIVES AT SEVERAL POINTS DURING THE INITIAL PHASES OF THEIR CAPTIVITY. THE UNDERSECRETARY DEFENDED THE POLICE ACTION ON THE GROUNDS THAT, WHILE THE GOE UNDERSTOOD FULL WELL THAT THE PRIESTS THEMSELVES REPRESENTED

NO THREAT OF VIOLENCE, MONSIGNOR PROANO'S INDIAN PARISHIONERS DID. HE SAID THAT PROANO HAD ORGANIZED THE INDIANS IN RIO-BAMBA AND WAS ABLE TO COMMUNICATE WITH THEM THROUGH A RADIO NETWORK THAT HE HAD ESTABLISHED. HE SAID THAT ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS IN PAST YEARS WHEN THE BISHOP'S ACTIVITIES HAD RESULTED IN LOCAL POLICE ACTION THE INDIANS HAD ATTACKED THE POLICE. THE GOVT THEREFORE FELT THAT IT HAD TO SHOW FORCE IN ORDER TO DETER THE BISHOP FROM CALLING ON THE INDIAN PARISHIONERS TO SAVE HIM. FURTHERMORE, THE POLICE ACTED BRUSQUELY AND, ADMITTEDLY, RUDELY IN ORDER TO GET THE PRIESTS ABOARD THE BUS AND OUT OF THE AREA AS RAPIDLY AS POSSIBLE.

7. THE AMBASSADOR ASKED THE MINISTER WHETHER HE FELT THAT ANY OF THE AMERICAN PARTICIPANTS WERE MIXED UP WITH THE ALLEGED SUBVERSIVE MACHINATIONS OF MONSIGNOR PROANO. THE UNDERSECRETARY REPLIED THAT IT WAS CLEAR THAT NONE OF THE FOUR U.S. BISHOPS NOR MR. SEDILLO WERE QUILTY. HOWEVER HE SAID, IT WAS ALSO CLEAR THAT BISHOP EDGAR BELTRAN WHO WORKS FOR THE BISHOPS' CONFERENCE IN WASHINGTON AND IS OF COLOMBIAN ORIGIN, WAS DEEPLY INVOLVED WITH MONSIGNOR PROANO IN SETTING UP THE MEETING AND ALSO WAS FULLY AWARE OF ITS SUBVERSIVE NATURE. THE AMBASSADOR TOLD THE UNDERSECRETARY THAT IF THE GOVT HAD EVIDENCE TO BACK UP ITS CHARGES AGAINST BISHOP BELTRAN HIS GOVT WOULD OF COURSE BE INTERESTED IN SEEING IT, INASMUCH AS HE IS A RESIDENT OF THE U.S.

8. THE AMBASSADOR ALSO REQUESTED THE UNDERSECRETARY TO RETURN A DOCUMENT WHICH THE AMERICAN BISHOPS HAD BEEN WORKING ON SINCE THE PHILADELPHIA ECUMENICAL CONGRESS HELD WHICH WAS JUST PRIOR TO THEIR COMING TO ECUADOR AND WHICH WAS THEIR ONLY COPY. THE UNDERSECRETARY PROMISED TO LOOK FOR THE DOCUMENT AND RETURN IT.

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9. LATER THE SAME DAY, JULIO PRADO, NEWSPAPER COLUMNIST, POLITICAL GADFLY, AND CONFIDANT OF GENERAL DURAN, ASKED TO SEE THE AMBASSADOR. PRADO LAUNCHED INTO AN ACCOUNT OF HOW HE, AS VICE PRESIDENT OF THE ECUADOREAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE, HAD TOLD GENERAL DURAN THAT HE INTENDED TO CALL TOGETHER THE COMMITTEE AND DENOUNCE THE GOE FOR ITS ATTACK ON THE BISHOPS. DURAN HAD THEN ARRANGED FOR PRADO TO SEE THE SEIZED DOCUMENTS. HIS PERUSAL OF THE LATTER CONVINCED PRADO THAT THE BISHOPS MEETING HAD INDEED BEEN INVOLVED IN INTERNAL POLITICS. THE UNSTATED CONCLUSION: PRADO WOULD TAKE NO ACTION.

10. ASIDE FROM JUSTIFYING TO THE AMBASSADOR HIS FAILURE TO SPEAK OUT ON THE ISSUE (PRADO IS THE GOE'S CANDIDATE FOR A

SEAT ON THE UN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION), PRADO'S PURPOSE
SEEMED TO BE TO DELIVER A MESSAGE TO THE AMBASSADOR FROM
GENERAL DURAN IN AN ATTEMPT TO JUSTIFY THE GOE'S ACTIONS.
DURAN, THE ONE MEMBER OF THE TRIUMVIRATE WHO SEEMS CLEARLY
TO HAVE AUTHORIZED THE RIOBAMBA RAID, APPARENTLY THOUGHT
PRADO WOULD BE MORE CONVINCING THAN THE MINISTRY OF GOVT.
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